

Do This In Remembrance Of Me

A Study Of The Communion Meal

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Bread and Wine

Why, When and What to Remember.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:42

The original Greek phrase translated here as “devoted” means “cannot not live without, required to survive, a critical dependency of or reliance on.” A better translation would have been “addicted.”

“The apostles’ teaching” is, of course, the NT writings. “The fellowship” is the meetings of the church or any gathering of disciples. (May refer to dates, singles devotionals, Bible talks, game night, socials, etc.) “Prayer” is obvious; conversations with God. Taking things to God.

But ‘they had a critical dependency of breaking of bread, a critical reliance on breaking of bread’ seems to be too much for a simple meal or a weekly ritual commanded by Jesus. In fact, it was not a weekly ritual nor a daily ritual (although it occurred at least once every day). Bread was a stable for the Jews. They pretty much ate it with every meal. Wine was not only a stable but almost a necessity. If you did not ferment your fruit juices, they would go bad within 24 hours. Fermentation of fruit juices preserved it so that you can drink it and not get sick. Wine was pretty much had with every meal also.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1Cor 11:23-25

This was something done to remember the covenant that God made with his people and to remember Jesus. It was to be a reminder “whenever” it was done not just when done as a ritual.

Other covenants with God had reminders. With Noah , the rainbow {Gen9:8-17}; with Moses, the keeping the Sabbath holy {Ex 20:8-11, Deut 5:12-15}, tassels to remember the commands of God {Num 15:37-41}, bronzed altar to remember that only the high priests can burn incense on the altar {Num 16:36-40}, the passover, feast of unleavened bread, first-born redemption for the exodus from Egypt {Ex 13:3-16}; with Abraham, circumcision {Gen 17:1-14}; with Adam, marriage to remember that he must rely on God {Gen 2:18-24}.

With the exception of circumcision and marriage, none of these were daily events. Circumcision was only a reminder for the men and marriage was only a reminder for those who were married. The breaking of the bread was three meals a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. This is the greatest, strongest reminder of his covenant that God has ever given his people.

But why did God choose bread and wine? It was not only a daily undertaking that probably happened three times a year but it also happened all over the world.

In China and Japan, they made flour with rice. In Japan they made wine with rice and in China with plums and other fruits. In India, they made wine with dates and they made flour out of peas to make roti. In Jamaica they made flour out of cassava to make bammy and wine from banana. In parts of Africa they make flour out of Coco plant (a tuber) to make coco bread. In Germany they have pita bread and make wine out of hops (beer). In Trinidad they make flour out of hops to make hops bread. In Mexico they make flour out of corn to make tortilla bread. In Italy they make pasta. In Ireland they use potatoes to make wine (whiskey) and flour to make potato bread. There are fried breads like festival, bammy, bake, roti, tortilla and johnny cake. There are boiled breads like pasta and dumplings. There are baked breads like parahta, pita and spiced bun.

Even in the one place in the world that you will not find alcohol –the Arab world-- you will still find coffee, ‘the wines of the gods.’ Discovered in the Arab world and kept exclusively there for centuries before they started roasting the beans for export –to prevent germination. The Arab world kept a monopoly on coffee until someone managed to smuggle out some un-roasted beans. They kept coffee to themselves because the wine of the gods was too sacred to place in the hands of the unbelieving infidels.

And all over the world, bread and wine was consumed almost daily. This is when God wanted us to remember Jesus and his love and sacrifice. Every time you bite into bread. Every time you drink fruit juice. Every time you give your body sustenance. Every time you feed your physical body, you should also feed your spiritual body.

This now raises the question, “what did Jesus want us to remember about him when he said, ‘Do this in remembrance of me?’” The bread, we know, represents his broken body on the cross and the wine the blood he spilled for our salvation but what made this something to which the disciples addicted themselves. The answer to that lies in the last week prior to the cross and the days that followed. John 12 starts six days before the Passover where Martha was serving Jesus –as usual– and Mary was at his feet –as usual– pouring perfume on him and washing his feet with her hair.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

John 12:7-8

Jesus continues to hint about his imminent death. This coming on the heals of the Lazarus miracle. John does not say when, relative to this event, that Jesus raised Lazarus but it was still fresh in the minds of everyone from the disciples to the crowds to the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. In John 11 they remembered how the sisters referred to Lazarus as ‘the one [Jesus] loved’ --much to the chagrin of John, probably-- and how he risked his life to save him –since the Jews tried to have him stoned there for blasphemy-- and how his love was so strong he was brought to tears. They also should have remembered at this time how he spoke about the resurrection and that he is ‘the resurrection and the life.’

Interesting here is also when he said:

“Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”

John 11:9-10

He repeats this sentiment later after explaining that he will be crucified. Although the prophets spoke about the Messiah being ‘lifted up,’ this reference was often seen in the days of the prophets like the snake in the desert being lifted up but in the times of the Romans, it meant only one thing; crucifixion. Sometimes it seems that that was all they understood.

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

John 12:23-33

They heard the voice from Heaven reply to him. Jesus once again lets them know that this was for their benefit, just like the death of Lazarus {John 11:4, 14-15, 41-42}. They also saw the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem {John 12: 12-13} just before this where the miracle of the colt occurred {Mark 11:1-6}.

In John 13 they see another miracle of the passover preparation {Mark 14:13-15}. They see Jesus serving them by washing their feet. He sets an example of servitude to each other for them to follow. He defines a leader among them as the servant. He gives them a new commandment to love one another the way he loved them. He prophesies his betrayal and death again. He also prophesies that Peter will betray him and all the disciples will abandon him although they all deny it. They all remember this. You don't abandon your best friend in their greatest hour of need –right after they tell you that you would-- then forget it ever happened. They remember him being right, truthful, upfront and forthcoming.

In John 14 he comforts his disciples several times to let them know that it will all be well. He tells them about preparing Heaven for them. He lets them know that they will do greater things than he has done. He lets them know that they have a place with the Father and that he will send the Counselor.

In John 15 he warns them to remain in him and to bear fruit –an impossible task without him. He reminds them to obey his commands so that their joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:12-13

This great love that he commands, he is about to demonstrate. He reminds them of what great friends they are to him. He lets them know that the world will hate and persecuted them more than it hated and persecuted him. They remember how the Jews wanted to kill him for alleged blasphemy and indeed they expected to die then {John 11:7-8, 15-16,47-57}.

They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

John 16:2

In John 16 he continues to warn them about persecution, encourage them with the promise of the Spirit and the defeat of Satan, tell them about his death and resurrection and comforts them with many words about the promises of God.

In John 17 he does an awesome prayer for unity among the believers. Understand that at this time he is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had just told the disciples that they would all desert him; they would strike the shepherd and the sheep would be scattered. They all denied it vehemently. He brings the twelve here to pray then takes Peter, James and John a little farther and says,

M“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Matt 26:38b

Yet they all fell asleep. Only one was awake enough to hear the prayer he made for unity. Matthew, arguably was not brought up as close as Peter, James and John –the one that Jesus loved and the one that stayed awake long enough to here the prayer-- but according to Luke, the physician that did his research before writing, Jesus only advanced a stone’s throw ahead of them {Luke 22:41}. Of course it could have been a small stone thrown really, really far. In Mark’s gospel, said to have been John Mark’s re-telling of Peter’s recollection, Jesus had addressed Peter saying,

Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?
Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

Mark 14:37

During his time of greatest need, his closest friends were not there for him. His Father had to send an angel to strengthen him {Luke 22:43}. He told them to watch and pray so that they were not tempted yet they all abandoned him when the mob came. One man even ran away naked rather than to be caught with Jesus {Mark 14:51-52}. They all ran but not before they saw him heal the ear of the high priest who’s ear Peter had cut off in an effort to kill him to save Jesus. The ear of the high priest who came to kill Jesus. Here is a man who wants Jesus dead and Jesus shows him mercy {Luke 22:51}.

Jesus goes before the Sanhedrin with the high priests, the temple guards, the Roman governor, the Jewish king, the Roman governor again, the Roman guards and does not retaliate for all they are doing to him. He is flogged and sent to be crucified.

While dying on the cross, he asks God to forgive those who are crucifying him. He

forgives one of the thieves being crucified with him. He turns to his mother who has no one to care for her now and the disciple he loves and gives his mother a son to take care of her and this disciple a woman in the home to help him. Even while suffering on the cross he is thinking of others; his enemies, strangers, his friends and his family. Not himself.

He dies, is buried and raises from the dead. So disfigured is he from the beating that his mother and best friends do not recognize him.

See, my servant will act wisely;
He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
Just as there were many who were appalled at him --
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man
and his form marred beyond human likeness.

Isaiah 52:13-14

He appeared to them after and explained again about the prophesies in the Old Testament about his death, burial and resurrection. And gave them the Holy Spirit that he had promised them and explained that he had to die so that many can be saved.

This is the memory to which the disciples were addicted. This is what they could not live without. This memory is what they needed to survive. If they were to make it in this world as disciples of Christ, they had to hold on to this like a pot-head to his stash of hash. They had a critical dependency of this memory, a critical reliance on it to survive.

His love for others, his obedience to God, his compassion for the lost, his concern for his friends, his commitment to righteousness, his boldness in adversity, his care for his enemies, his confidence in the face of death, his servitude in leadership, his humility amongst accusations, his heart and soul and mind and strength.

Remember Jesus' sacrifice for you, for strangers, for family and friends. Remember his serving his disciples. Remember his risking his life to save Lazarus. Remember his giving his life to save you. You need to be addicted to this. Without this, you will not survive as a disciple. Devote yourself to the breaking of bread.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47